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The Pauline Epistles in Tertullian's Bible

Matthew V. Novenson

I.

The question of the fate of Paulinism in late antiquity, a point of controversy in early Christian studies especially since Adolf von Harnack, has benefited from fresh attention in recent research, even as, simultaneously, there is ever less agreement among New Testament scholars on the question what Paulinism actually is. This state of affairs comes sharply into focus in Todd Still and David Wilhite's edited volume *Tertullian and Paul*, the first in a new series from T. & T. Clark on the reception of Paul in the church fathers.¹ Reading and assessing *Tertullian and Paul* is a sometimes dizzying experience of intertextuality. The reader encounters, for example, Margaret MacDonald reading Elizabeth Clark reading Tertullian reading Paul. What is more, Paul himself is reading, for example, Second Isaiah, who is reading First Isaiah, who is reading parts of the Pentateuch, and so on. One thinks of Derrida's notion of *différance*, in which any

1. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite, eds., *Tertullian and Paul* (PPSD 1; London: T. & T. Clark, 2013). The present essay has been revised in light of valuable comments from Markus Bockmuehl, David Eastman, Mark Elliott, Todd Still, Benjamin White, and David Wilhite. Any remaining deficiencies are my own responsibility.

given text refers to other texts, which refer to still other texts, which refer to still other texts, and so on, ad infinitum.²

But to say that the encounter with Still and Wilhite's book is dizzying is not to say that it is fruitless. On the contrary, their well-advised project of gathering experts from patristics and New Testament studies around a fictive seminar table allows the reader to see things in Paul and in Tertullian that she would not otherwise be in a position to see. This is the book's unique contribution to this interdisciplinary field of research. To date, we have, on the one hand, studies of Tertullian that give some attention to his interpretation of Paul (e.g., Holl, Lortz, O'Malley, Osborn, and Dunn);³ and, on the other hand, studies of the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of the Pauline epistles that give some attention to Tertullian's exegesis (e.g., Aleith, Wiles, Lindemann, Rensberger, Pervo, Eastman, and White).⁴ Closest to Still and Wilhite's project, we have a

2. See Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* (trans. Alan Bass; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-28.

3. Karl Holl, "Tertullian als Schriftsteller," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928 [orig. 1897]), 1-12; Joseph Lortz, *Tertullian als Apologet* (2 vols.; MBT 9-10; Münster: Aschendorff, 1927-1928); T. P. O'Malley, *Tertullian and the Bible: Language, Imagery, Exegesis* (LCP 21; Nijmegen: Dekker & Van De Vegt, 1967); Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004).

4. Eva Aleith, *Paulusverständnis in der alten Kirche* (BZNW 18; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1937); Maurice F. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum* (BHT 58; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979); David K. Rensberger, "As the

number of short studies dedicated to Paul and Tertullian (e.g., Barth, Rambaux, Sider, Lieu, and Bain).⁵ These studies have been largely—although not entirely—preoccupied with the question whether Tertullian gets Paul right or wrong, a question to which we will return. Still and Wilhite’s book, while it does perpetuate that classic debate, also allows space for finer-grained comparative analysis of Paul and Tertullian on topics in which both were keenly interested: the nature of God, the threat of persecution, the management of women, and other such.

Which raises the very interesting question how an editor best goes about structuring a book like this. What are the topics in which both Paul and Tertullian were interested? At one level the construction of a table of contents is a mundane editorial decision, but at another level it

Apostle Teaches: The Development of the Use of Paul’s Letters in Second-Century Christianity” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981); Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); David L. Eastman, *Paul the Martyr: The Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011); Benjamin L. White, “Imago Pauli: Memory, Tradition, and Discourses on the ‘Real’ Paul in the Second Century” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 2011).

5. Fritz Barth, “Tertullians Auffassung des Apostels Paulus und seines Verhältnisses zu den Uraposteln,” *JBT* 8 (1882): 706-756; Claude Rambaux, “La composition et l’exégèse dans les deux lettres *Ad uxorem*, le *De exhortations castitatis*, et le *De monogamia*, ou la construction de la pensée dans les traités de Tertullien sur la remariage,” *REA* 22 (1976): 3-28; 201-217; and 23 (1977): 18-55; Robert D. Sider, “Literary Artifice and the Figure of Paul in the Writings of Tertullian,” in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul* (ed. William S. Babcock; Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1986), 99-120; Judith M. Lieu, “‘As much my apostle as Christ is mine’: The Dispute over Paul between Tertullian and Marcion,” *EC* 1 (2010): 41-59; Andrew M. Bain, “Tertullian: Paul as Teacher of the Gentiles,” in *Paul and the Second Century* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson; LNTS 412; London: T. & T. Clark, 2011).

cuts to the core of the religious thought of both ancient figures, respectively. A book like this one, but organized according to Paul's literary rubric, would proceed city by city around the eastern Mediterranean—a chapter on the church in Thessalonica, a chapter on the church in Corinth, and so on. A book like this one, but organized according to Tertullian's literary rubric, would be a strange animal, by turns doctrinal (on the trinity, the soul, the resurrection, etc.) and practical (on dress, remarriage, fasting, etc.), but almost always polemical (against Jews, pagans, Marcionites, Valentinians, etc.). Still and Wilhite's decision to organize the book according to an artificial modern rubric is therefore very sensible. Wilhite explains in his introduction, "The following essays are topical. For the sake of convenience, the subjects treated follow a roughly systematic outline, beginning with God and concluding with eschatology."⁶ This is true, although a number of the chapters in between (e.g., on Israel, on martyrs, on women, on heresy) do not correspond to familiar loci from systematic theology. The table of contents actually represents a mix of conventional theological categories (e.g., the holy spirit) and other analytical topoi (e.g., gender), all of which suit the two ancient corpora in question, as different as those two corpora are from one another in other respects.

6. David E. Wilhite, "Introduction: Reading Tertullian Reading Paul," in *Tertullian and Paul*, xxi.

In their explanations of the rationale for the book, Still and Wilhite naturally emphasize the similarities between Paul's and Tertullian's respective projects.⁷ One might question, however, whether these similarities are really as deep as they may at first appear. Still writes, "Paul and Tertullian were both ancient, occasional, pastoral theologians";⁸ but not, I think, in the same way. Paul is pastoral in the sense that he performs the function of an itinerant minister to his own congregations, and he is occasional in the sense that his literary *oeuvre* consists entirely of ad hoc letters to those congregations. Tertullian writes on topics of pastoral concern, but he does not have episcopal responsibility for any ecclesial body (*Exh. cast.* 7.3; *Mon.* 12.1-4);⁹ and his treatises are occasional in the sense that they address current issues, but they are proper theological treatises nonetheless. But the most important difference between Paul and Tertullian, for our purposes, is precisely the fact that Paul is himself a source for Tertullian. And not a source just in the way that Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* is a source for Tertullian's *Adversus Iudaeos*, but a biblical source, a source with authority virtually equal to the Gospels (*Praesc.* 4.1; *Marc.* 5.1) and greater than the Torah (*Marc.* 4.1). Whereas Paul's Bible consists of

7. Wilhite, "Introduction"; Todd D. Still, "Afterword: Tertullian and Pauline Studies," in *Tertullian and Paul*, 282-284.

8. Still, "Afterword," 283.

9. Perhaps he should be counted among the North African *seniores laici*, "lay elders," but this is neither clear nor agreed upon.

the law and the prophets (Rom 3:21), Tertullian's Bible consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament (*Prax.* 15.1; *Marc.* 3.14.3; 4.6.1).

II.

With this observation in mind, and in dialogue with Still and Wilhite and their contributors, it will be helpful to make several salient points under the heading "the Pauline epistles in Tertullian's Bible." First of all, with respect to the history of the New Testament canon, it is very significant that Tertullian's thirteen-letter *corpus Paulinum*, unlike other ancient recensions, corresponds exactly with ours. On the one hand, Tertullian famously denounces Marcion's ten-letter edition of Paul, writing, "This epistle alone [viz. Philemon] has so profited by its brevity as to escape Marcion's falsifying hands. As however he has accepted this letter to a single person, I do not see why he has rejected two written to Timothy and one to Titus about the church system. I suppose he had a whim to meddle even with the number of the epistles [*Affectavit, opinor, etiam numerum epistularum interpolare*]" (*Marc.* 5.21).¹⁰ On the other hand, however, Tertullian also differs from those of his contemporaries who attribute to Paul more than the thirteen letters. Unlike his Alexandrian counterparts Clement and Origen, Tertullian does not

10. Text and trans. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (2 vols.; OECT; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

count Hebrews among the Pauline epistles. In a fascinating passage in *De pudicitia*, after first adducing apostolic evidence in favor of sexual abstinence, Tertullian supplements this with sub-apostolic evidence: “I wish redundantly to superadd the testimony likewise of a particular comrade of the apostles, which is aptly suited for confirming, by most proximate right, the discipline of his masters. For there is extant also an Epistle to the Hebrews under the name of Barnabas—a man sufficiently accredited by God, as being one whom Paul has stationed next to himself in the uninterrupted observance of abstinence: *Do not Barnabas and I alone have the power of working?* [1 Cor 9:6]” (*De pud.* 20).¹¹ Tertullian proceeds to quote Heb 6:4-8 (“It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have fallen away...”) as Barnabas’s corroborating testimony against the possibility of postbaptismal repentance for fornicators. Hebrews is, for Tertullian, a sub-apostolic letter.

Relatedly, Tertullian provides one of our earliest examples of the detection and rejection of Pauline apocrypha. In *De baptismo*, arguing against the idea that Paul permits women to perform baptisms, Tertullian writes, “If certain Acts of Paul, which are falsely so named [*Acta*

11. Latin text ed. Charles Munier, *La pudicitie* (2 vols.; Sources chrétiennes 394-395; Paris: Cerf, 1993). Trans. alt. from Thelwall in ANF. Our text of 1 Cor 9:6 (per NA28) reads ἡ μόνος ἐγὼ καὶ Βαρναβᾶς οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν μὴ ἐργάζεσθαι; “Do only Barnabas and I not have the right to refrain from working?” But Tertullian’s text of the verse reads *Aut ego solus et Barnabas non habemus operandi potestatem?* which lacks an equivalency for the μὴ in the last phrase and so exactly reverses the sense of the verse.

Pauli quae perperam scripta sunt], claim the example of Thecla for allowing women to teach and to baptize, let men know that in Asia the presbyter who compiled that document, thinking to add of his own to Paul's reputation [*presbyterum qui eam scripturam construxit, quasi titulo Pauli de suo cumulans*], was found out, and though he professed he had done it for love of Paul, was deposed from his position" (*De bapt.* 17.5).¹² This text is a *locus classicus* for the discussion of early Christian attitudes toward pseudepigraphy and an obvious difficulty for the view that the practice was considered benign by ancient readers.¹³ In view of his attitude toward the *Acts of Paul*, there is perhaps some irony in the fact that Tertullian's *corpus Paulinum* includes letters that are now widely regarded as pseudonymous (e.g., Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus). But of course, Tertullian could not have predicted that sea change in scholarly opinion, and if he had encountered it one suspects that he would have had mounted a spirited defense of the authenticity of these letters.

12. Text and trans. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964).

13. For the latter view see Bruce M. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," *JBL* 91 (1972): 3-24; and against it see now Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Note that Tertullian's objection to the *Acts of Paul* has to do not with pseudonymity but rather with inauthenticity. Those who favored the *Acts of Paul* claimed not that Paul wrote the text but that it was a true account of his acts, and it is this latter claim that Tertullian disputes.

With respect to the epistles of Paul to the churches, although Tertullian knows them as part of his Bible, he also attests the tradition that each of the original Pauline congregations preserved a master copy of its letter from the apostle. In *De praescriptione*, Tertullian writes:

Go through the apostolic churches, where the very thrones of the apostles at this very day preside over their own districts, where their own genuine letters are read [*apud quas ipsae authenticae litterae eorum recitantur*], which speak their words and bring the presence of each before our minds. If Achaia is nearest to you, you have Corinth. If you are not far from Macedonia, you have Philippi. If you can travel into Asia, you have Ephesus. Or if you are near to Italy, you have Rome, where we too have an authority close at hand. (*Praesc.* 36.1-2)¹⁴

It is possible that, as Bruce Metzger suggests, *ipsae authenticae litterae* here means to refer to the actual autographs of Paul's letters.¹⁵ Alternatively, one could perhaps interpret the phrase to mean simply "uncorrupted versions" in contrast to the recensions in circulation among the heretics.¹⁶ In any case, for Tertullian the Pauline epistles are not only a canonical deposit enshrined in the New Testament but also the inheritances of the several apostolic congregations.

14. Latin text ed. R. F. Refoulé, *Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques* (Sources chrétiennes 46; Paris: Cerf, 1957). Trans. alt. from T. H. Bindley, *Tertullian: On the Testimony of the Soul and On the Prescription of Heretics* (London: SPCK, 1914).

15. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 4n4.

16. But *ipsae* may suggest that the former interpretation is the more defensible.

Thus far the canon and the text of Tertullian's *corpus Paulinum*. But how, more specifically, does Tertullian use his Pauline and other biblical sources? The scripture index prepared by Dekkers et al. in the Corpus Christianorum edition confirms Adolf von Harnack's claim that Tertullian's scriptural citations run at least into the 3000s, which is actually, by my count, a very conservative estimate.¹⁷ Tertullian is well known, of course, for his two-testament Christian Bible (*Prax.* 15.1; *Marc.* 3.14.3; 4.6.1), but fully two-thirds of his scriptural citations come from the New Testament. Of those New Testament citations, roughly forty percent come from the *corpus Paulinum*, which is noticeably but not vastly disproportionate. By far the most frequently cited Pauline letter is 1 Corinthians, which is cited more than twice as often as its nearest competitor, Romans, three times as often as 2 Corinthians, Galatians, or Ephesians, and more than seven times as often as any other Pauline letter.¹⁸ The shorter epistles are all reasonably well represented, with the exception of Philemon, which Tertullian recognizes (*Marc.* 5.21) but does not cite.¹⁹ Tertullian's most frequently cited chapter of Paul is 1 Corinthians 15,

17. Adolf von Harnack, "Tertullians Bibliothek christlicher Schriften," *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 10 (1914): 303-334, here 308n1. For his estimate Harnack follows the index prepared by Franz Oehler, *Q.S.F. Tertulliani opera omnia* (3 vols.; Leipzig, 1851-1854) as well as the study of Hermann Roensch, *Das neue Testament Tertullians* (Leipzig, 1871).

18. So rightly Sider, "Literary Artifice," 119: "Tertullian's Paul, it would seem, emerges more from the Epistles to the Corinthians than from the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians."

19. Dekkers et al. suggest an allusion to Phlm 10 in the phrase *onesimum aeonem* at *Val.* 32.4,

the discourse on the resurrection of the dead, which he uses heavily in *De carne Christi* and *De resurrectione mortuorum*, as well as in book 5 of *Adversus Marcionem*. A strong second most frequently cited chapter is 1 Corinthians 7, Paul's counsel regarding sexual desire and marriage, which features prominently in *De exhortatione castitatis*, *De virginibus velandis*, *De monogamia*, and *Ad uxorem*.

Tertullian's most frequently cited Pauline verses follow a similar trend. The most cited verses, with ten citations each, are 1 Cor 7:29 "From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none...";²⁰ 1 Cor 11:19 "There must be *haireseis* among you in order that those who are genuine may be recognized...";²¹ and 1 Cor 15:50 "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...";²² Next in line with nine citations is 1 Cor 15:53 "This perishable nature must put on the imperishable...";²³ And finally, eight-times cited passages include 1 Cor 1:27 "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise...";²⁴ 1 Cor 7:9 "It is better to marry than to

but this is unlikely. Oehler proposes, quite plausibly in my view, that *onesimum* may be a corruption for the numerical name of an aeon ending with the superlative -issimum (F. Oehler, *Q. S. F. Tertulliani opera omnia* [ed. minor; Leipzig, 1854], 888).

20. *Exh. cast.* 4.2; 6.1; *Cult. fem.* 2.9.6; *Marc.* 1.29.4; 5.7.8; 5.8.7; *Mon.* 3.2; 7.4; 11.4; *Ux.* 1.5.4.

21. *An.* 3.1; *Herm.* 1.1; *Praescr.* 4.6; 30.4; 39.1; 39.7; *Prax.* 10.8; *Res.* 40.1; 63.8; *Val.* 5.2.

22. *Carn.* 13.3; *Marc.* 5.10.11; 5.10.15; 5.12.6; 5.14.4; *Res.* 48.1; 49.9; 50.3; 51.4; 51.7.

23. *Marc.* 5.10.14; 5.12.3; *Res.* 42.2; 50.5; 51.8; 54.2; 54.4; 57.9; 60.4.

24. *Bapt.* 2.3; *Carn. Chr.* 4.5; *Fug.* 2.1; *Marc.* 5.5.10; 5.19.8; *Praescr.* 7.1; *Prax.* 10.7; *Res.*

burn...”,²⁵ 1 Cor 7:39 “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives...”,²⁶ 1Cor 10:4 “They drank from the spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ...”,²⁷ 1 Cor 11:5 “Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head...”,²⁸ 2 Cor 5:17 “If any one is in Christ, there is new creation...”,²⁹ and Eph 6:12 “We contend not against flesh and blood but against the principalities and powers...”³⁰

Of course, a scripture index is not an infallible guide to a writer’s theology, but in the matter before us it is an important piece of evidence. It is striking, and not coincidental, how many of Tertullian’s most well worn Pauline texts have to do with women’s bodies, personal eschatology, and false teaching. In view of this pattern, there is some truth in Hans von Campenhausen’s comment: “Tertullian does not study the Bible in order to derive from it personal enlightenment, edification, or secret knowledge. He loves it for its hard, practical realism, he loves in particular the inexorable clarity of its demands on which salvation

57.11.

25. *Exh. cast.* 3.6; 3.9; 3.10; *Marc.* 5.7.6; *Mon.* 3.4; *Pud.* 1.15; 16.15; *Ux.* 1.3.3.

26. *Exh. cast.* 4.4; *Cor.* 13.5; *Marc.* 5.7.8; *Mon.* 11.1; 11.3; 11.10; 11.11; *Ux.* 2.2.3.

27. *Bapt.* 9.3; *Adv. Jud.* 9.22; *Marc.* 3.5.4; 3.16.5; 4.35.15; 5.5.9; 5.7.12; *Pat.* 5.24.

28. *Cor.* 6.1; 14.1; *Marc.* 5.8.11; *Or.* 22.1; 22.4; *Virg.* 4.1; 8.2; 11.1.

29. *Jejun.* 14.2; *Marc.* 4.1.6; 4.11.9; 4.33.8; 5.2.1; 5.4.3; 5.12.6; 5.19.11.

30. *Fug.* 1.5; 12.3; *Jejun.* 17.8; *Marc.* 3.14.3; 5.18.12; 5.18.13; *Praescr.* 39.1; *Res.* 22.11.

depends.”³¹ It is instructive to consider, by contrast, Pauline texts that Tertullian passes over in silence. As far as I have been able to tell, he never cites Gal 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free...”; Gal 5:22 “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience...”; 1 Cor 13:13 “Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love...”; Rom 3:21 “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law...”; or Rom 5:12 “Just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin...,” to name several interesting examples. On the other hand, Tertullian does cite the bewildering 1 Cor 15:29 “If the dead are not raised, why are people baptized on their behalf?” twice (*Marc.* 5.10.1; *Res.* 48.11) and the textually questionable 1 Cor 14:34-35 “It is shameful for a woman to speak in church...” four times (*Bapt.* 17.4; 17.5; *Marc.* 5.8.11; *Virg.* 9.1). Tertullian’s preference for these Pauline texts rather than those is just the kind of thing that modern critics have in mind when they say, as many have said, that Tertullian did not really understand Paul.

31. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (trans. J. A. Baker; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972 [German original 1968]), 275.

III.

Which brings us back to the question to which I promised to return, namely: Did Tertullian get Paul right or wrong? A useful way into this question is to consider, for instance, the answer of one eminent scholar of early Christianity who receives some attention in Still and Wilhite's book. Gilles Quispel writes:

Joseph Lortz as early as 1928 observed that the religiosity of St. Paul represented only one type of primitive Christian piety and the rational, monotheistic approach of the Apologists another equally valid and valuable type. This phenomenological approach should be supplemented by the historical observation that Paul never came to Africa and that his letters were never really understood there. Tertullian and Cyprian and their descendants, the Donatists, as well as the Catholics until St. Augustine preached the New Law and did not really understand what 'the rightwising of the ungodly' or 'suffering with Christ' or 'Christ is the end of the law' really meant.³²

Quispel represents the majority view from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century: that Tertullian fundamentally fails to understand Paul's central theological ideas (for Quispel, 'the rightwising of the ungodly,' 'suffering with Christ,' and 'Christ the end of the law'). Quispel,

32. Gilles Quispel, "African Christianity before Minucius Felix and Tertullian," in *Actus: Studies in Honour of H. L. W. Nelson* (ed. J. den Boeft and A. H. M. Kessels; Utrecht: Institute of Classical Languages, 1982), 257-335, here 297. Quispel's initial reference is to Lortz, *Tertullian als Apologet*, 2:20-30. This comment of Quispel's is discussed by Andrew B. McGowan, "God in Christ: Tertullian, Paul, and Christology," in *Tertullian and Paul*, 1-2.

following Lortz, attributes Tertullian's misunderstanding to a prevailing misunderstanding of Paul in ancient African Christianity generally, but there are other explanations on offer. Echoing F. C. Baur, Fritz Barth argues that Tertullian strips Paul of his theological genius in order to make him conform to the rest of the apostolic tradition.³³ Eva Aleith suggests that Tertullian was unable to understand Paul because of his own fundamentally different religious sensibilities.³⁴ Claude Rambaux argues that Tertullian willfully misrepresents Paul's sexual ethics because of his own personal pathologies.³⁵ Most recently, Calvin Roetzel follows Barth in criticizing Tertullian for filing down the apostle's rough edges.³⁶

The last half-century of scholarship, however, has witnessed a reaction against this dim view of Tertullian's grasp of Paul. Maurice Wiles counters that it is really only Protestantism, not Paulinism, that is lacking in the church fathers prior to Augustine.³⁷ Andreas Lindemann argues that Tertullian is not simply reacting to Marcion but has his own coherent account of

33. Barth, "Tertullians Auffassung."

34. Aleith, *Paulusverständnis*, 49-61; similarly Quispel, "Christianity in Africa."

35. Rambaux, "La composition et l'exégèse." See further idem, *Tertullien face aux morales des trois premiers siècles* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1979).

36. Roetzel, "Paul in the Second Century," esp. 235-237.

37. Wiles, *Divine Apostle*, 132-139.

Pauline theology.³⁸ Robert Sider suggests that, if we give due consideration to Tertullian's literary project, then he is really not so far from Paul, after all.³⁹ The contributors to Still and Wilhite's book take different views on this vexed question, but as a group they are broadly sympathetic with the recent resuscitation of Tertullian's reputation as an interpreter of Paul. And yet, not a few of them—in particular, John Barclay, Elizabeth Clark, Bruce Longenecker, and Todd Still—justifiably indict Tertullian for some quite serious misreadings of key Pauline texts.⁴⁰ This persistent feature of the secondary literature raises the meta-level question how we ought to conceive what Tertullian is doing when he cites Paul. What kind of a textual activity is it? By what criteria do we call any given instance of Tertullian citing Paul a use, misuse, abuse, or otherwise? Just here, I would like to make a modest proposal.

38. Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus Apostel und Lehrer der Kirche: Studien zu Paulus und zum frühen Paulusverständnis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 294-322; and idem, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum*, 378-395.

39. Sider, "Literary Artifice."

40. John M. G. Barclay, "Tertullian, Paul, and the Nation of Israel: A Response to Geoffrey D. Dunn," in *Tertullian and Paul*, 98-103; Elizabeth A. Clark, "Status Feminae: Tertullian and the Uses of Paul," in *ibid.*, 127-155; Bruce W. Longenecker, "Did Tertullian Succeed? Reflections on Tertullian's Appropriation of Paul in His Response to Marcion," in *ibid.*, 247-258; Todd D. Still, "Martyrdom as Sacrament: Tertullian's (Mis)Use of 'the Apostle' (Paul)," in *ibid.*, 119-126.

Scholars working in philosophy (and in cognate branches of religious studies) sometimes use the handy concept of rational reconstruction, in which we imagine what a great dead thinker might say in response to a contemporary question of ours. This is to be distinguished from historical reconstruction, which describes and explains the views of the dead thinker in his own historical context (which is what biblical scholars usually mean by “exegesis”). As Richard Rorty puts it, “Analytic philosophers who have attempted ‘rational reconstructions’ of the arguments of great dead philosophers have done so in the hope of treating these philosophers as contemporaries, as colleagues with whom they can exchange views. They have argued that unless one does this one might as well turn over the history of philosophy to historians.”⁴¹ And again, “[We] want to imagine conversations between ourselves... and the mighty dead. We want this not simply because it is nice to feel one up on one’s betters, but because we would like to be able to see the history of our race as a long conversational interchange.”⁴² Rational reconstructions, then, include things like Giorgio Agamben’s Pauline political philosophy or Eric Gregory’s Augustinian ethic of democratic citizenship.⁴³ It seems to me that one possible way

41. Richard Rorty, “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres,” in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (ed. Richard Rorty et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 49.

42. Rorty, “Historiography of Philosophy,” 51.

43. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (trans. Patricia Dailey; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Eric Gregory, *Politics and the*

around the impasse over the question whether Tertullian gets Paul right or wrong is to think of Tertullian's interpretive project as a rational reconstruction of Paul rather than a historical reconstruction, a thought experiment rather than a disciplined exegesis.⁴⁴ Of course, Tertullian himself does not make this modern distinction, although he does make an analogous distinction between a biblical text's original context and its subsequent ecclesiastical contexts (*Praesc.* 8; cf. *An.* 35.2; *Res.* 33.5).⁴⁵ In other words, Tertullian is aware of a degree of historical distance between Paul and himself, even if he also believes that his interpretation of Paul is incontrovertibly right: *tam meum apostolum quam et Christum*, "as much my apostle as Christ is mine" (*Marc.* 5.1.8).

Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

44. Cf. Michael F. Bird, "Paul, Tertullian, and the God of the Christians: A Response to Andrew B. McGowan," in *Tertullian and Paul*, 20: "If there is one category that best describes what Tertullian is doing with Paul it is probably 'theological exegesis.'" As I see it, theological exegesis is an accurate but insufficiently specific descriptor for Tertullian's use of Paul. Closer to my notion of rational reconstruction is Sider, "Literary Artifice," 120: "Tertullian's experiment in a Christian literary art whose ends the apostle was made to serve should in itself command our attention. But out of his rhetorical art a figure of the apostle emerges worthy also of our interest, a figure capable of change and growth, rendered present to the reader in the sound of his voice and the touch of his flesh, but at the same time a figure with the power and authority appropriate to a haloed saint."

45. On which see R. P. C. Hanson, "Notes on Tertullian's Interpretation of Scripture," *JTS* 12 (1961): 273-279; Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Tertullian's Scriptural Exegesis in *De praescriptione haereticorum*," *JECS* 14 (2006): 141-155.

In this connection, it is instructive to consider Mark Elliott's recent essay "The Triumph of Paulinism by the Mid-Third Century," in which he contends that there is in fact a robust strand of catholic Pauline exegesis running right through Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen. Elliott echoes the argument of Maurice Wiles, who wrote, "The theory that the thought of Paul was totally lost in obscurity of a dark Pelagian world until the shining of the great Augustinian light is one deserving to be dismissed to that very limbo of outworn ideas in which it would itself seek to place the early patristic commentaries on the writings of the divine apostle."⁴⁶ For my part, I would demur from saying that Paulinism had triumphed by the third century C.E., since this seems to suggest an identity between the Paulinism of, say, Tertullian and the Paulinism of Paul himself. I would agree with Elliott that a version of Paulinism was ascendant by the third century, and I would agree that that version of Paulinism has at least as strong a claim to "authenticity" (defining which, of course, is precisely the problem) as Marcion's or Augustine's version of Paulinism. But to the extent that Tertullian needs Paul to speak to his own turn-of-the-third-century proto-orthodox African Christian problems, his Paulinism is not identical with Paul's own Paulinism, nor could it possibly have been. One thinks of Arnaldo Momigliano's characterization of Tertullian's idiosyncrasies: "He was more afraid of original sin... than

46. Wiles, *Divine Apostle*, 139.

reassured by the Eucharistic sacrifice.... He understood punishment more readily than atonement.... He saw more devils than angels.”⁴⁷ Tertullian’s Paulinism is, to use Rorty’s term, a rational reconstruction, which is no insult to Tertullian.

In closing: At least two contributors to Still and Wilhite’s book quote Harnack’s famous *bon mot*: “Marcion was the only Gentile Christian who understood Paul, and even he misunderstood him.”⁴⁸ In view of the subject matter of this book, Harnack’s comment is obviously apropos. As Andrew McGowan reminds us in his contribution, however, according to Harnack’s contemporary and critic Franz Overbeck, this immortal comment originally occurred in the context of polite banter at a dinner party, where Overbeck claims that he said it to Harnack with reference to the nineteenth-century disciples of Hegel.⁴⁹ In any case, the “Marcionite” version of the comment found its way into Harnack’s influential *History of Dogma* and has been

47. Arnaldo Momigliano, review of Timothy D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, in *JRS* 66 (1976): 273-276.

48. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (trans. Neil Buchanan; 7 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1894-1899), 1:89. Harnack’s comment is cited and discussed by McGowan, “God in Christ,” 1-2; Stephen Cooper, “Communis Magister Paulus: Altercation over the Gospel in Tertullian’s *Against Marcion*,” in *Tertullian and Paul*, 227.

49. Franz Overbeck, *Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919; repr. 1963), 218-219; noted by Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 93n32; and thence McGowan, “God in Christ,” 1.

a commonplace in discussion of second-century Christianity ever since.⁵⁰ While it is a brilliant epigram, however, as an analytical tool Harnack's comment is virtually useless. To say simply that a later thinker understood or misunderstood an earlier one is as imprecise as, well, dinner party banter. Granted, Marcion grasps Paul's conviction that a radically new state of affairs was effected by the death and resurrection of Jesus, but Marcion infers from this that the God of Israel is an evil demon, which is an egregiously un-Pauline conclusion. Tertullian, for his part, denies Paul's conflict with the Jerusalem apostles, erases Paul's distinction between psychic bodies and pneumatic bodies, and turns Paul's ethical concessions into prohibitions, among other interpretive liberties. On the other hand, he grasps Paul's conviction that the law and the prophets testify to the gospel and so makes the fateful decision to retain Paul's Bible as part of the Christian Bible. In fact, both Marcion and Tertullian understand Paul, and both Marcion and Tertullian misunderstand Paul, but on different issues and in different respects. To say, as

50. The fuller context of the famous saying runs as follows: "The dependence of the Pauline Theology on the Old Testament or on Judaism is overlooked in the traditional contrasting of Paulinism and Jewish Christianity, in which Paulinism is made equivalent to Gentile Christianity.... This judgment is confirmed by a glance at the fate of Pauline Theology in the 120 years that followed. Marcion was the only Gentile Christian who understood Paul, and even he misunderstood him: the rest never got beyond the appropriation of particular Pauline sayings, and exhibited no comprehension especially of the theology of the Apostle, so far as in it the universalism of Christianity as a religion is proved, even without recourse to Moralism and without putting a new construction on the Old Testament religion" (Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:89-90).

Harnack does, that Marcion's misunderstanding of Paul was better than Tertullian's (or vice versa) is a pledge of theological allegiance, not a historical judgment. What we need is a subtler, less dogmatic, more historically specific approach to comparing late ancient theologians with their apostolic forebears. Todd Still and David Wilhite, together with their contributors, take steps in the direction of such an approach, and for this we may be sincerely grateful.